

A visit to the Wilhelm Reich Archive in Boston in the year 2012

by Andreas Peglau¹

Before Wilhelm Reich died in the U.S. on Nov. 3, 1957, he had stipulated in his will that his legacy would not be made available to the public until 50 years after his death. In November 2007 the time had come. As part of my book and dissertation project "[Unpolitische Wissenschaft? Wilhelm Reich und die Psychoanalyse im Nationalsozialismus.](#)" in January 2012 I visited - apparently as the first German-speaking researcher - this archive, located at the Medical School of Boston's Harvard University.



Medical School, Boston's Harvard University.

¹ I have already reported on this archive visit in International Newsletter of Communist Studies No. 25 (2012), pp. 22-25: http://newsletter.icsap.de/home/data/pdf/INCS_25_ONLINE.pdf and in Werkblatt. Psychoanalysis and Social Criticism No. 69, issue 2/29th year 2012, pp. 74-79: <http://www.werkblatt.at/aktuell.html#69>. This article uses sections from both publications. The photographs used are by Andreas Peglau and Philip Bennett. Since 2021, the [Wilhelm Reich Museum has regained physical control over this archive stock](#). Please cite as: Peglau, Andreas (2023): A visit to the Wilhelm Reich Archive in Boston in the year 2012 (<https://andreas-peglau-psychoanalyse.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/A-visit-to-the-Wilhelm-Reich-Archive-in-Boston.pdf>). The forwarding and distribution of this text for *non-commercial* purposes is expressly desired. **Please note:** For my English skills are not very good, I first translated the text with [DeepL](#) and then corrected it. I expect that there are still translation errors - and ask those who discover such errors to send a message to info@andreas-peglau-psychoanalyse.de



The entrance to the library

My intention was not only to find previously unknown details about the history of psychoanalysis here. I also wanted to shed more light on the interaction and conflicts between Reich and the KPD or the European Left. I was able to do both. The results are now available in print (Peglau 2017). Therefore, I will limit myself here to a few details that seem to me additionally worth sharing.

First - for all those who might want to work in this archive themselves someday - some information about the general conditions.

Reich's legacy is administered and maintained by the Wilhelm Reich Infant Trust:

<https://wilhelmreichmuseum.org/>

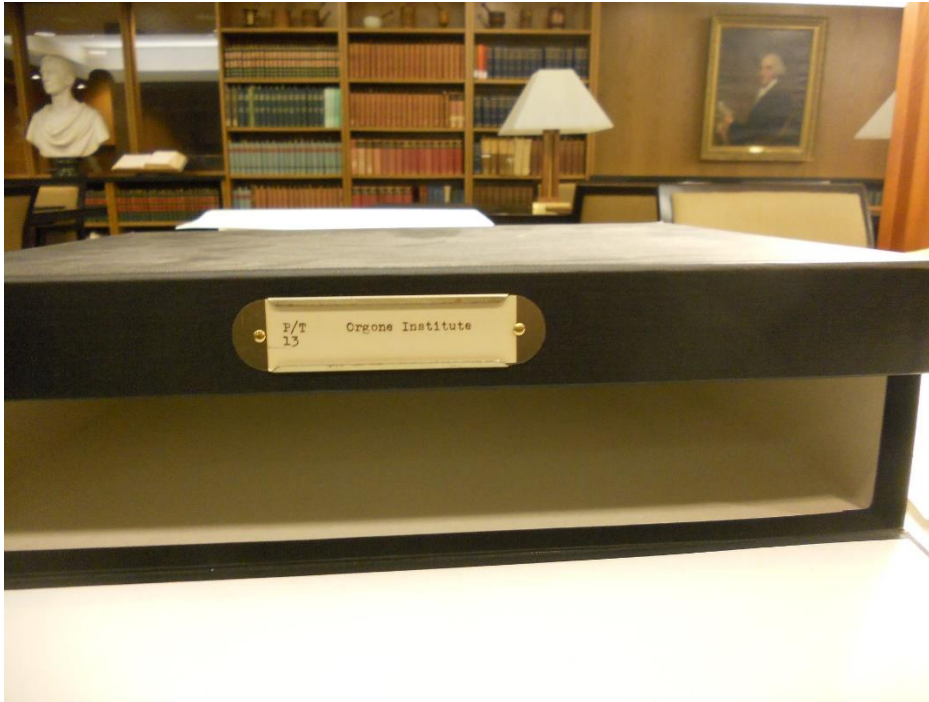
This trust organizes public events, publishes books and other material, initiates projects and maintains the Wilhelm Reich Museum in the state of Maine, at Reich's last place of residence:

<https://wilhelmreichmuseum.org/museum/>

In order to ensure the best possible usability for the Wilhelm Reich Archive - about whose history, which began in March 1957, the Trust's website informs as well as about the Reich biography - it was given to Boston's Harvard University. The material there is presented on the Trust's website in an index, which can be found at

<https://wilhelmreichmuseum.org/about/research-and-publications/>

The material is clearly organized into boxes and folders, mostly arranged either chronologically, alphabetically, or by context of meaning.



One of the boxes in which the Reich estate is stored

A large proportion of the post-1939 documents are in English, the earlier ones almost entirely in German, some in Scandinavian languages.

Requests for access should be made directly to the Trust's management, subject to the usual conditions for U.S. private archives:

<https://wilhelmreichmuseum.org/about/archives-of-the-orgone-institute/>

If the latter gives its consent, it passes the list of documents ordered on to the archivists responsible at Harvard University.

I was able to cooperate effectively with both institutions, so that the approval was received within a few weeks. Supported on site by my friend, the Reich researcher Philip Bennett, I was soon able to conduct research in the archives stored in the basement of the Medical School.

Now to the contents of the Wilhelm Reich archive.

It also contains photographs, tape and film recordings, but of course mainly written documents. For those interested in the history of psychoanalysis, those documents illustrating Reich's development in Vienna, Berlin, and Scandinavia, i.e., from the 1920s to 1939, are likely to be of particular importance.



On the hunt for clues ...

These include Reich's entire writings, many of which are associated with corresponding collections of material (e.g., about 100 pages on the suppression of the Vienna uprising of July 1927 alone), various letters or correspondence with Sigmund Freud and other psychoanalysts such as Otto Fenichel, Edith Jacobssohn, Hellmuth Kaiser, Anna Freud, going far beyond what was published in *Reich speaks of Freud*², reviews of his books collected by Reich, newspaper clippings, circulars, personal documents and notes (for example, a 12-page manuscript "On my expulsion from the KPD"), and minutes of meetings of the *Einheitsverband für proletarische Sexualreform und Mutterschutz* (Unity Association for Proletarian Sexual Reform and Maternity Protection, later subsumed by Reich under "Sex-Pol"), during which the confrontation with Reich's alleged counterrevolutionary views took place in early 1933.

Moreover, an exchange of letters between Reich and the International Psychoanalytic Publishing House concerning Reich's book *Character Analysis*, which lasted from 1933 to 1938, makes it clear that the repeatedly expressed view that Freud or the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) had wanted to "destroy" Reich in 1933/34³ was not true: Apart from the production of Reich's book, the publishing house, which was essentially controlled by the Freud family, took over and retained the complete publishing supervision of the book, including advertising and distribution. This is not how anyone who wanted to destroy Reich would have behaved.

Also with regard to Reich's political development, which was inseparably connected with his professional standpoints, various new insights can be gained from the archive material. In particular, with the help of detailed minutes of a Reich comrade-in-arms, I was able to trace very precisely the disputes between Reich and the KPD from the fall of 1932 onward, and - through further research in Germany - to assign names and biographies to many of the people involved for the first time.⁴

² Reich, Wilhelm/Eissler, Kurt R. (1972): *Reich speaks of Freud*, hg. von M. Higgins/Ch.M. Raphael, London: Condor.

³ For example, Cremerius, Johannes (1997): Der "Fall" Reich als Exempel für Freuds Umgang mit abweichenden Standpunkten eines besonderen Schülertyps, in Fallend, Karl/Nitzschke, Bernd (eds.): *Der „Fall“ Wilhelm Reich. Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Psychoanalyse und Politik*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, p. 144.

⁴ Reich himself gave only relatively brief details about these conflicts, mostly avoiding name references, see especially Reich, Wilhelm (1995) [1982]: *Menschen im Staat*, Frankfurt a. M.: Stroemfeld/Nexus.

Die Partei hat festgestellt und beschlossen, dass Reichs Schriften völlig unmarxistisch sind. Was uns not tut, ist eine energische ideologische Offensive. Der Artikel über Reich ist zwar noch nicht erschienen, das wird aber noch geschehen. Wahrscheinlich wird sogar eine gründliche Auseinandersetzung in Form einer Broschüre herausgegeben. Im übrigen handelt es sich um eine Disziplinfrage. Wenn R.'s Standpunkt von der Partei als unmarxistisch erklärt wird, dann hat sich jeder wirkliche Kommunist dem zu fügen. Die Arbeiter werden uns schon begreifen.

From the minutes of the discussions on Reich at the KPD meeting of 27.1.1933. The confrontation announced there never took place.

Back in Berlin, I was even able to identify in a Brandenburg archive this previously completely unknown comrade-in-arms and minute-taker himself - of whom only the name appeared in Boston.

Bezirks-Versammlung
am 17.1.33. in den Sophiensälen
der Kampfgemeinschaft für rote Sporteinheit
ooo Rep. Fritz Hupfeld

From the Hupfeld minutes


Fritz Hupfeld, I discovered, had worked as a youth welfare worker for the city of Berlin since 1921, and since 1929 (and until 1933) in a managerial capacity at the Lindenhof Children's Home in Berlin. He was born on 3.2.1895, joined the SPD in 1921, the KPD in 1932. According to Hupfeld's personnel file of 1952, his KPD membership ended in 1933. In 1945 he became a KPD member again, and in 1946 a member of the SED. He quit his job at the rank of government councilor in the penal system of Saxony-Anhalt in 1949 because - as he writes in a 1949 curriculum vitae - he could not accept that death sentences were being carried out there. He now became head of the Brandenburg Prison Service. I learned from his granddaughter that he was also later interested in psychoanalytical topics and that he died on August 25, 1974.

(Stempel der ausgebenen Dienststelle)

Vertraulich!

Personalbogen

Zur Beachtung: Sämtliche Fragen sind gewissenhaft und in gut lesbarer Schrift zu beantworten. Striche sind unzulässig. Falls die hier vorgesehenen Spalten zur genauen Beantwortung nicht ausreichen, ist eine Anlage beizufügen. Legen Sie einen ausführlichen handschriftlichen Lebenslauf bei.



A. Personalien

1. **Zuname** (bei Frauen auch Geburtsname) Hupfeld

2. **Vornamen** (Rufname unterstreichen) Heinrich, Richard, Fritz

3. **Geburtsdatum und Geburtsort** 3. Februar 1895 Fürstenwalde (Spree)

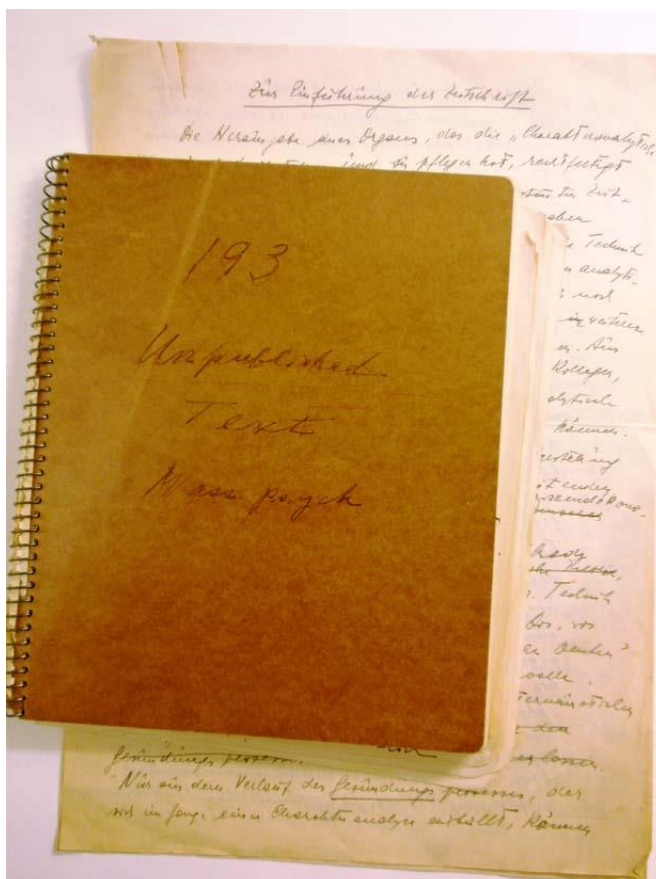
Excerpt from the personnel file (fonds Landeshauptarchiv Brandenburg Rep. 203, PA 472).

Through his protocols, Hupfeld protected an important historical detail from oblivion.

However, prominent KPD leadership functionaries such as Wilhelm Pieck, Ernst Schneller, and Ernst Grube were also involved in the disputes with Reich in 1932/33, as well as people who are largely forgotten today, such as Fritz Bischoff, the chairman of the mass organization IFA, which was close to the KP. In the meetings, which took place until the end of February 1933, i.e. still after the Nazi takeover, an explosive dispute took place: about fundamental questions of communist politics and self-representation up to the point of whether psychoanalysis, sexual reform and Marxism can be combined.

The Boston archives also contain extensive reflections on Reich's expulsion from the Danish Communist Party, which was publicly announced in the fall of 1933, but of which he was never a member. Through archived letters and reviews, one also learns of contacts with Leon Trotsky, Willy Brandt (in the Federal Archives in Berlin I discovered that the latter and Reich were to be tried together for high treason in 1939),⁵ Jacob Walcher and other contemporaries from the left spectrum as well as from the Western European Freethought Movement, the radical Social Democrats and the anarcho-syndicalists.

The documents also show how Reich, who had previously been an ardent, though never uncritical, communist, increasingly adopted an anti-Stalinist course in the 1930s, which he soon advocated publicly.



Boston also contains a wealth of additional information about one of Reich's greatest scientific and political achievements, his *Massenpsychologie des Faschismus*, which appeared as early as 1933: from various reviews - both enthusiastic and defamatory - to an as yet unpublished, handwritten manuscript with discussions of mass psychology.

Of course, during my stay in Boston I made an effort to sift through everything that was relevant to my topic. But even if I succeeded in doing so, there are still many treasures to be found in this archive: Reich's work was much broader.

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Treasure yet to be unearthed: unpublished Reich manuscript

⁵ See [here](#) and in Peglau, Andreas (2017): Unpolitische Wissenschaft? Wilhelm Reich und die Psychoanalyse im Nationalsozialismus, Psychosozial-Verlag Gießen, pp. 338-345.